

*prepared in response
to short-deadline
question to Admiral
Turner
JE + DK*

The land boundary between Iran and Iraq is poorly defined and has over the years been a source of hostility between the two sides. As early as 1932, disputes over water rights and land holdings exacerbated the problem.

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The pre-1975 border dispute in the central border area was confined to a 130-mile strip of territory. The width of the controversial strip was not extensive. Bounded by Khanaqin and Qasr-e-Shirin on the north and Badra and Mehran on the south, the disputed portions were only about 2 miles in many places, about 10 miles in the largest salient, and 3 to 6 miles at the north and south extremities. The territory, mostly mountainous and hilly, was not of any particular economic value since it contained no oil fields, oil pipelines, industrial cities, large towns, significant transportation networks or dense rural population.

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Just after the Algiers Accord and the subsequent June 1975 Baghdad Treaty were signed, according to American Embassy Tehran sources, there was still considerable confusion over territorial adjustments along the land border. Over the years prior to 1975, Iran had apparently encroached on Iraqi territory--in some cases as far as 14 kilometers. After the signing of the Accord, Iran appeared reluctant to give up these areas as they contained strategic terrain and in some cases Iranian-built roads. Before the current outbreak of hostilities, Iran had apparently not returned these territories.

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In October 1976, according to an American Embassy Tehran cable, an Iranian source said that the Iranians were preparing for minor exchanges of as much as 10-15 kilometers along the central border west and southwest of the city of Ilam and north of Mehran. We do not know that any exchanges took place as a result. This area is apparently inhabited by Kurdish-speaking tribes who led an isolated existence behind the mountains until the building of a wide road a few years before for military purposes.

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Iraq apparently raised no official protest while the Shah was in power, probably expecting that the Iranians would eventually fulfill that portion of the Accord.

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To our knowledge, the agreement concerning the Shatt al Arab was honored by both sides while the Shah was on the throne.

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Since Khomeini's rise to power, both sides have violated the provision of the Accord concerning the meddling in each others' internal affairs.

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